

The National Park System

Caring for the American Legacy

"...to promote and regulate the use of the...national parks...which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

—National Park Service Organic Act, 16 U.S.C.1.

The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

The National Park Service still strives to meet those original goals, while filling many other roles as well: guardian of our diverse cultural and recreational resources; environmental advocate; world leader in the parks and preservation community; and pioneer in the drive to protect America's open space.

The National Park System of the United States comprises over 370 areas covering more than 83 million acres in 49 States, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, Saipan, and the Virgin Islands. These areas are of such national significance as to justify special recognition and protection in accordance with various acts of Congress.

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Introduction

As part of its diversity initiative, the National Parks Conservation Association created the Community Partners Program to bring together community partners with staff of the National Park Service (NPS). The purpose of the Community Partners Program is to foster better communication between these two groups in order to further the National Park Service's mission and increase ethnic communities' involvement with their national parks.

One of the primary ways in which community members can become involved is to work for the National Park Service. But how does one become an NPS employee? This booklet—written both for National Park Service supervisors with hiring responsibilities and for individuals who want to become NPS employees—discusses ways to hire people and tips on how to navigate through the bureaucratic vacancy announcement system.

This booklet is divided into two parts. Part I is for people interested in becoming National Park Service employees. Part II, for National Park Service supervisors, shows how they can broaden the applicant pool when filling positions.

A glossary of terms is also included for your reference. See Appendix A.

In Appendix B, we have provided the names and phone numbers of individuals who have been involved in this project. You may contact these people for more information.

We have also included a suggestion page (Appendix C) so you can tell us what you think of this booklet. This is our first attempt, and we welcome suggestions on how to improve or change these materials.

CHAPTER 1:

KINDS OF JOBS AVAILABLE

The National Park Service (NPS) currently has funding for about 13,000 full-time employees. Some of these jobs are not filled, while others are filled by short-term employees. Over the next 3-12 months, we will be filling jobs in many fields, including interpretation, maintenance, administration, resource management, education, dispatch communications, and law enforcement. Some jobs are office-oriented, while others focus on working with the public, school children, or natural and cultural resources. Many jobs will be permanent; some will be filled for terms of one to four years, and others will be filled seasonally.

Permanent and term jobs offer a complete benefits package, including health and life insurance and an outstanding retirement program. Almost all jobs offer the opportunity to accrue annual leave and sick leave, and overtime pay is sometimes available.

Many people desire permanent or term jobs with the National Park Service. These jobs are highly competitive. However, there are several other types of jobs to consider:

Most NPS units offer summer and winter seasonal jobs. (There are more than 370 NPS units in the United States!) The summer season usually runs from early May through mid-September, although some parks have seasons that start earlier and end later. Winter seasonal jobs usually run from October through March. Check for these jobs at www.usajobs.opm.gov.

Volunteering is a wonderful way to gain valuable experience and learn whether or not this is the career for you! Having volunteer experience is a great way to make your application more competitive. You also get a chance to meet some great people who can give you career advice and guidance. Volunteers assist park staff in ALL aspects of operations, and they work shifts ranging from 4 hours a month on weekends to 40 hours per week. Frequently, full-time volunteers (or interns) get a small stipend and housing. Many people have worked as interns through Student Conservation Association programs, which led them to permanent jobs. For more information about volunteer opportunities, contact a national park or a regional National Park Service office (see Appendix B).

Park partners are usually environmental or historical non-profit organizations that have a working partnership agreement with a national park. Working with a partner organization allows you to work within a national park and interact with visitors and resources without being a National Park Service employee. For more information about these employment opportunities, contact the park personnel office.

Another option is to work for a concessionaire in a national park. Concessionaires are usually for-profit enterprises offering goods and services to park visitors on a contractual basis.

Concessionaires offer such amenities as lodging, food, dry goods, souvenirs, and tours. The employees they hire usually work in the hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops.

As you can see, many opportunities are available to work in a national park. Each job and organization performs a vital function—that of providing visitors an opportunity to enjoy a unique experience, while working hard to preserve these resources for future generations. We encourage you to explore the many opportunities to work in a national park while meeting your personal and professional goals.

CHAPTER 2:

WHERE TO FIND OUT ABOUT NATIONAL PARK SERVICE JOBS

Many different avenues can lead to employment with the National Park Service. The procedures vary from position to position. Most positions may be applied for directly with the park or employing office, while some require you to send an application to the national office.

Your best source of information about job openings is vacancy announcements. (These are listed at www.usajobs.opm.gov). A vacancy announcement explains the basic duties, pay, what experience or education is necessary to qualify, how to apply, and what type of appointment will be made (permanent, temporary, term, etc.). You can review vacancy announcements to identify positions best suited to your experience, education, and interests.

Can I apply?

All vacancy announcements have an “Area of Consideration” that will describe whose applications will be accepted. “All sources,” “All qualified,” or “Open to everyone” includes all U.S. citizens. “Federal status candidates,” “Government-wide,” “Service-wide,” or “Bureau-wide” indicates that you must be a current permanent federal employee or be eligible for reemployment (called reinstatement) based on prior permanent federal employment.

Some exceptions allow all citizens of the United States, regardless of prior federal service, to apply for a vacancy. (When the “Area of Consideration indicates “Federal Status Candidates,” you must have previously held a permanent federal position to apply or be eligible for non-competitive hiring.) Examples of non-competitive hiring appointments include: Veterans’ Readjustment Appointment (VRA), Mentally and Physically Disabled, returning Peace Corps Volunteer, and Student Career Employment Program (SCEP).

If you are interested in a vacancy, you must submit an application or resume for a specific announcement. If you do not have a resume/application prepared, you can request an optional application form (OF-612) from any federal agency personnel office or download it from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) web site:

Vacancy Announcements

www.usajobs.opm.gov

Application Forms

www.opm.gov/forms/html/of.htm

Tips for reviewing vacancy announcements

- Review the entire vacancy announcement (some include supplemental forms or request specific documentation/proof of information).
- Get your application postmarked by the closing date. Sometimes the applications must be received by the closing date—so read the announcement carefully. (Agencies usually do not give extensions.)
- Your application will not be returned to you (whether or not you are hired). If you want a copy, make it before you send it into the personnel office.
- Be sure your application is complete. The park personnel office will not call you to ask for more information.

Please review all positions carefully for the following items:

- Residency and citizenship requirements
- Age requirements
- Physical requirements

Kinds of jobs

Permanent Positions

All permanent employees are entitled to a full benefits package (health, life, or retirement coverage). U.S. citizenship is required and you must be at least 18 years of age. When you begin your first permanent federal position, you are in a “career conditional” appointment or status. After three consecutive years of satisfactory service, you are converted to “career” status. If for any reason you leave the government while in career conditional status, you have three years reinstatement rights to be re-employed into another federal permanent position. If you resign after receiving career status, you have lifetime reinstatement rights.

Seasonal Positions

Seasonal employees serve in varied capacities in most National Park Service sites throughout the United States. Many departments such as maintenance, natural resources, and interpretation have recurring seasonal positions to help during their heavy seasons. Check for these job announcements at www.usajobs.opm.gov. Individual parks may also fill more unusual seasonal positions, such as backcountry cooks or animal packers. They would use the same hiring procedures as temporary positions. You must be a U.S. citizen, age 18 years or older, to qualify for these positions.

Temporary Positions

These positions normally have a “not to exceed date” of no more than one year. Typically these positions are created in association with a specific short-term need or project. The

National Park Service normally does not offer health, life, or retirement benefits; however, employees can earn both annual (personal/vacation) leave and sick leave. Temporary positions can be terminated at any time due to lack of work and/or funds. U.S. citizenship is required, and you must be 18 years or older to qualify.

Term Positions

Term positions are similar to temporary positions, but employees are hired for more than one year and the position can be extended for up to four years. Term employees are entitled to full benefits. Term positions can be terminated at any time due to lack of work and/or funds. U.S. citizenship is required, and you must be 18 years or older to qualify.

Student and Internship Opportunities

Student Appointments

Students have two options to gain employment with the National Park Service: Student Career Employment Program (SCEP) and Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). You must be enrolled in an accredited school to qualify for these appointments. You must be at least 16 years old.

- **SCEP/Student Career Employment Program** – A program where students must be enrolled as a degree-seeking student and taking at least a half-time academic, vocational, or technical course load in an accredited high school, technical school, two- to four-year college or university, or professional school. Students may work full or part time as long as work does not interfere with their academic schedule. Work must be related to their major. The National Park Service requires a written agreement between the National Park Service, school, and student. The student is eligible for health and life insurance and retirement benefits. Upon graduation, the student becomes eligible for noncompetitive conversion to a permanent position within 120 calendar days. You must be an U.S. citizen to get a permanent job.
- **STEP/Student Temporary Employment Program** – This program is similar to the SCEP Program, with a few differences. The individuals hired under this program are not eligible for a permanent position after graduation. No health or life insurance or retirement benefits are offered. The agency does not require a signed agreement with the school, and the job does not need to be related to the student's major. However, you must be a currently enrolled half-time student to be eligible for this program.

Internships

Internships may be paid or unpaid and usually fall under one of four general categories: resource management, interpretation, trails, and public relations. Interns are assigned to a specific site and work alongside park rangers or other staff. Internships are open on an on-going basis, according to available funding and the needs of specific sites. An internship can last from 12 weeks to a year, and most are full time. Full-time interns are required to work 40

hours a week. Dorm-style housing and reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses (\$15/workday) may be available. Part-time internships can be arranged, but housing may not be offered. College credit can be arranged in some cases. You may be required to have a valid driver's license and drive a government vehicle as part of the job. In some cases, you may need your own car to get to and from work. J-1 visa or U.S. resident status is required. You must be 16 years or older to obtain an internship, and you must be 18 years or older to live in park housing.

Tips on applying for a position with the National Park Service

Here are some suggestions to help you find your way through the maze of applying for a job with the National Park Service. Submittal requirements may vary depending on the national park, so be sure to check with the personnel office announcing the position for specific requirements.

Step 1: Obtain a Vacancy Announcement

National Park Service jobs are announced through vacancy announcements. These are listed on the web at www.usajobs.opm.gov.

Step 2. Decipher the Vacancy Announcement

A vacancy announcement includes many pages. Some information relates to the specific job, while some is general information.

The specific job information includes:

- 1. Position:** This is the title of the position being announced, the nature of the position (such as term, permanent) and the pay level of the position. Position pay levels begin at GS/WG-1 and move up. Entry-level positions are usually rated GS/WG- 3, 4 or 5. (GS is the pay system for white-collar jobs. WG is the pay system for blue-collar jobs.)
(If you are interested in Ranger positions, look for titles such as Park Ranger, Park Guide, and Visitor Use Assistant.)
- 2. Announcement Number:** All announcements are assigned numbers for identification purposes. Be sure to include the announcement number on ALL pages of your application.
- 3. Salary Range:** The annual minimum to maximum range of salary or hourly salary rate for this position.
- 4. Opening Date:** The date the vacancy announcement was released to the public.
- 5. Closing Date:** The date by which the personnel office should receive the application. Some personnel offices accept a postmark by this date; check with the announcing office.

6. Area of Consideration: Identifies who can apply for the position. If you have any questions, contact the personnel office.

7. Qualification Requirements: Indicates the work experiences or education required to meet the minimum qualifications for the position. It may list a variety of positions through which you may have gained your experience. Read this section carefully. Refer to the Statement of Duties and the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities for a description of the position.

8. Statement of Duties: Otherwise known as the job description, where the duties of the job are listed.

9. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (also known as KSAs): You should respond to these questions. Answers to these questions are as important as your resume or application form. While providing this information is optional, doing so will enhance your application and provide the supervisor with more details of your work experience.

10. “This position has no known promotion potential.” This means you can’t be promoted within the position. It does not mean you can’t move up. Most people move up by applying to other positions at the next level.

Step 3: Complete Your Application

You must submit an application or resume for the specific announcement (see page 3, “Can I Apply?”). If you use a resume, you must include:

- job title and announcement number
- What grades you are applying for
- Your name, mailing address, phone number, and Social Security number
- Work experience (include specific dates of month, date, and year), salary and hours worked per week, employer’s name and phone number
- Highest level of education completed (list names and addresses of schools attended, major(s), degree, and year received)
- Other job qualifications or relevant training
- Are you a citizen?
- Do you claim veterans preference? If so, attach DD214 or other proof
- Have you ever been employed as a federal civilian employee? If so, give highest grade attained
- Are you eligible for reinstatement based on previous federal status?
- Sign application and date it

CHAPTER 3:

PREPARING A RESUME FOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE JOBS

Preparing a resume for a National Park Service job (or any federal job) is a little different from what you may have learned from resume-writing books or from college career centers. When applying for federal jobs, it is better to:

- Include the specific dates you worked (use “June 1, 1999, through September 15, 1999” instead of vague terms such as “summer of 1999” or “June 1999 through September 1999”). Be sure to list the amount of time you worked—for example, part-time or full-time—and the number of hours.
- Rather than providing an overview of your work, describe the complexity and details of the jobs you worked (“I handled an electronic cash register,” “I balanced the cash receipts at the end of my shift and reconciled records,” “I greeted customers, dealt with their complaints, and wrote up reports.”)
- Specify the amount of supervision you received (“My supervisor only reviewed my work,” “I opened the store and had no supervision until the noon shift,” “I was the leader of the sales group on weekends.”)

See Chapter 2, Step 3: Complete Your Application, for more information.

The following pages are a sample resume prepared for a Visitor Use Assistant (or Fee Collector).

Sample Application (Resume)

Visitor Use Assistant, GS-025-05
Announcement # GOGA-98-209

Anita Job
200 Owl Street
Oakland, CA 94849
Social Security # XXX-XX-XXXX
415/xxx-xxxx (h)
415/xxx-xxxx (w)

Work Experience:

Education Director, May 25, 1995 – Present (April 30, 1999)
Salary: \$26,000 per year, 40 hours per week
Change the World with Theater, 100 F Street, San Francisco, CA 94110
Supervisor: Emma Goodperson, 415/555-1212

- Design, implement and supervise education programs for youth in theater. Design programs for both on-stage and backstage training. The 12-week programs are presented year-round with 24 programs per year and 30 students in each session.
- Supervise 3 paid full-time employees and 20 part-time volunteers to conduct programs.
- Collaborate with other community youth organizations on three separate programs.
- Created after-school program in 1997 with three youth organizations.

Volunteer, Peer Educator, June 30, 1996 – June 30, 1997
Youth Health Services, 200 J Street, Oakland, CA 94869
Supervisor: Joe Healthy, 510/555-9999

- Provided outreach to youth for peer support programs. Verbally presented information about physical and mental health to youth groups. Provided presentations to youths in school programs and social clubs. Group sizes ranged from 20 to 50 people.
- Facilitated peer support groups twice a month. Prepared and initiated focused discussion topics.

Volunteer, Community Consultant, April 21 – 30, 1996
“The Mission District: A Documentary”, 133 Mission Street, San Francisco, 94110

Leader: Sandy Filmmaker, Director and Producer 415/555-4444

- Researched history of individual members of community and four historical structures
- Conducted oral history of five community residents.

Administrative Assistant, January 12, 1992 – May 20, 1995

Salary: \$18,000 per year, 32 hours/week

Evergreen, Inc., 1242 Old Mine Road, Sacramento, CA 95831

Supervisor: Ken Evergreen, 905/555-9000

- Provided administrative support in Public Information office.
- Researched and organized information for 20 staff members to present at public outreach meetings. Research involved use of primary and secondary resources.
- Coordinated and presented facility orientation tours to perspective clients, employees and company VIP's. Orientations included operations philosophy and facility goals. Participants averaged 20 per tour.
- Implemented waste paper recycling program at Mine Road facility.

Day Shift Manager, July 20, 1990 – December 12, 1993

Salary: \$12 per hour, 30 hours/week

Duck Loonies Bar and Grill, 411 Information Road, Evanston, Illinois 49602

Supervisor: Ihava Job, 405/555-9090

- Supervised 12 employees during day shift. Employees included cooks, waiters, bartenders and security.
- Assured exceptional quality of food, beverage and service. Responded to visitor comments and resolve complaints.
- Maintained daily receipts that averaged \$15,000 per day. Ordered equipment, food and alcohol.

EDUCATION

City College of Oakland, 48 Semester Credit Hours, 1992-1994

San Francisco State University, BA Ethnic Studies, 1996

JOB RELATED QUALIFICATIONS

Training:

- Conflict Resolution, Career Training, Inc., Completed May 1994

Skills:

- Ability to speak, read, and write fluent Japanese
- Proficient in Macintosh and PC: Windows for workgroups, Adobe Page Maker

Honors

- Volunteer of the Year, Youth Health Services
- Outstanding Youth Leader, 1994, Mayors Council on Youth and Education

Certificates/Licenses

- CPR for the Professional Rescuer, certified 1995, expired May 1996
- Current California Driver's License

Responses to Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs)

It is very important that you respond to the KSA questions. They provide a more accurate assessment of your skills. Keep your answers short and to the point. Vacancy announcements usually specify that answers to each question should not exceed one page. Be sure to **QUALIFY AND QUANTIFY** your responses.

Sample KSA Questions

1. Ability to communicate orally and in writing.
2. Knowledge or experience in accounting for cash deposits, record keeping and inventory procedures.
3. Ability to develop and present interpretive programs.
4. Knowledge of natural and cultural history and ecological principles of California and the Bay Area.
5. Ability to plan and manage a site education budget and to supervise interns and volunteers.
6. Demonstrated ability to work with diverse communities and experience in collaborating and designing programs for diverse audiences.

Question may vary with positions. Answer only those questions asked on the vacancy announcement.

Consider the following to help you identify applicable experience.

1. Educational courses taken and degrees received (Include copies of transcripts, if available).
2. Volunteer experience such as plant restoration work, history or museum work, church group organizing, leading outdoor adventures.
3. Personal projects and hobbies.
4. Work experience, special work projects, recognition, awards.
5. State **WHO** (who was your audience, who received your services, etc.). State **WHAT** (what was the concept and depth of your work, conversations, etc.). State **HOW MANY** (how many people, how much money, etc.).

Sample answers to KSAs

Question Four: Knowledge of natural and cultural history and ecological principles of California and the Bay Area

I am a third generation San Franciscan and was born and raised in San Francisco. In high school I learned about the cultural and natural history of the Bay Area. I completed two community college courses titled “Wildlife of the Bay Area” and “Historic Homes of San Francisco.”

I served as a community consultant for “The Mission District,” a 40-minute documentary covering the cultural and social history of the Mission District of San Francisco. In this project, I provided historical information about the Mission District and its relation to the broader historical relevance to the City of San Francisco and the Bay Area. I researched the history of four historic structures and conducted five oral history interviews. I provided on-site consultation during filming.

At Save the World through Theater, I presented orientation tours, which included the history of the theater building and the community. The tours were provided to the general public, students and donors.

Question Six: Demonstrated ability to work with diverse communities and experience in collaborating and designing programs for diverse audiences

As a child my family moved to many places. I had the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of people. My experiences include living in Huntington Park, Los Angeles; Sunset District, San Francisco; Tenderloin, San Francisco; Fresno; and Chicago. All of these places had many different types of people from varied backgrounds. Through involvement in community activities, I learned to accept and appreciate differences in lifestyle, opinion, culture, age and class.

I carried my appreciation for difference to my work as a Community Outreach Health Educator. In this position I talked with community members and individuals about the effects of risky behavior patterns. Many of the people I worked with held different opinions about sexual behavior and drug use. My work demanded a sensitivity and awareness to the sexual attitudes of people from other cultures. Over time I realized that not only could I accept the differences, but also I learned to communicate effectively with people of different backgrounds about sensitive issues.

As the Education Director at Save the World through Theater, I designed and implemented an interactive educational program for at-risk youth. The program focused on building skills

that youth could use to benefit the community while providing job training. The content of the theatrical presentations focused on personal identity such as ethnic background, sexual orientation, religious background, class background, and immigration status. This required me to develop the ability to mentor young people in exploring their identities and backgrounds, which were different from my own.

Across many desks: Who evaluates my application?

Submitting the application—timeframe and allowances

Watch this carefully! Your application must be received by the personnel office by the close of business on the closing date shown on the job announcement. If you mail your application, it must be postmarked by the closing date and received in personnel no later than five days after the vacancy has closed (this may vary at different personnel offices). Faxed or e-mailed applications will not be accepted.

Qualifications and rating review

The staffing assistant looks for completeness and reviews each application to ensure the applicant meets basic qualifications for the position. All required forms must be received by this time. If required, a review panel will be convened to rate the applications. Raters can be from the same or different parks, but must have subject matter (job-related) expertise. The raters review applications based on responses to the statement of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs). Usually the supervisor has written up a score sheet, which gives the raters a framework in which to do their rating.

Certificate of eligibles

When the raters send their completed work back to the personnel office, the staffing specialist reviews the rating panel's work for accuracy, then develops a Certificate of Eligibles for the supervisor to use. This is a list (or several different lists) of the most qualified applicants, along with their complete applications. Often this list is divided into several smaller groupings of applicants who qualify under a variety of hiring authorities.

Certificate to supervisor

These lists go to the supervisor, who can make selections off one or all of the lists. The supervisor is looking for the person who has the best combination of skills needed to do the job, willingness to learn new skills quickly, ability to manage multiple priorities, ability to fit into the existing team format, etc.

When a supervisor “considers” an application, the first step is usually a phone call to the applicant to determine his or her interest and availability. Then the supervisor may conduct an interview with the applicant and may contact two to three of the applicant's current and former supervisors for reference checks.

Review by park management and the personnel office

After all the interviews and reference checks are complete, the supervisor makes a recommendation to the management team to hire one applicant. The supervisor must describe the methodology used, the results, and the benefits of hiring one person over another. If the recommendation is accepted, personnel staff will then review each step of the

process to double check the applicant's eligibility and review all other factors surrounding the selection process.

Job offer

After the management and personnel office review, the personnel staff tells the supervisor the selection has been approved. Finally, the supervisor can make a job offer to the top applicant. If the applicant accepts the position, a mutually agreeable starting date will be negotiated. If the applicant declines the offer, the supervisor must go back to management and personnel to get approval to offer the position to the second choice...and so on.

Re-announcement

If it turns out that no applicant is acceptable to the supervisor, the position is re-announced.

CHAPTER 4:

SPECIAL HIRING PROGRAMS

While National Park Service (NPS) supervisors can always hire current NPS employees for their vacancies, supervisors may also look for outside individuals who want to join the NPS workforce.

The following are some special hiring programs created to reach specific audiences. Supervisors may use any of these hiring programs to solicit applicants while also advertising their vacancies to current NPS employees. Talk to your NPS human resources staff for more information.

Appointing Authority for Persons with Disabilities: Individuals with disabilities may be appointed to any professional, administrative, technical, clerical, or blue-collar position for which the applicant qualifies. After two years of successful performance in the position, a permanent job may be offered. Certification by a State Vocational Rehabilitation or Veterans Administration counselor is required for appointment.

Bilingual/Bicultural Appointments: This program permits agencies to hire persons who are proficient in Spanish and/or knowledgeable about Hispanic culture and who are otherwise qualified for positions in which bilingual/bicultural skills would enhance job performance.

Outstanding Scholar: This special hiring authority is established for certain entry-level positions at the GS-5 and GS-7 levels. Applicants must be college graduates with a GPA of 3.45 or better or in the upper 10 percent of their class. Individuals selected are appointed to permanent positions.

Peace Corps Personnel or Action/VISTA Volunteers: This hiring authority allows Peace Corps personnel or Action/VISTA volunteers (who have completed no less than 12 months of continuous service) to be hired for professional, administrative, technical, blue-collar, or clerical positions. Individuals qualify for this hiring status in the year following their Peace Corps or Action service.

Presidential Management Intern Program (PMI): This program was established to attract outstanding graduate students from a variety of academic disciplines to the federal service. They participate in a competitive nomination process devised by their university or college. PMIs receive an initial two-year appointment. After successfully completing the program, PMIs may be eligible for a permanent appointment based on the needs of the agency and their work performance.

Student Educational Employment Program (SEEP): This program has two components: Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) and the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). SCEP provides paid work experience related to the student's educational program and career goals and offers conversion to a permanent job after graduation and

completion of 640 hours of work. STEP allows students to earn salaries in temporary jobs while continuing their studies.

Thirty Percent or More Disabled Veteran Appointment Authority: This appointment requires certification of disability from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Applicants are hired for temporary positions for which they qualify up to grade GS-15 or equivalent, including wage grade. Applicants may be given a permanent position if performance is satisfactory and applicable qualification requirements are met.

Veterans Readjustment Appointment (VRA) Authority: The VRA authority can be used only to fill positions through the GS-11 level and equivalent jobs under other pay systems. Applicants must have completed more than 180 days of active duty—all or part of which occurred after August 4, 1964—and have received other than a dishonorable discharge.

For jobs at the grades GS-1 through GS-3 or equivalent, military service usually qualifies if the employing office determines that the veteran can do the required work. However, at the higher-grade levels, the veteran must meet the minimum qualification standards, including passing a written test if necessary. VRA appointees initially are hired for a two-year period. Successful completion of the VRA leads to a permanent position.

Worker-Trainee Program: This program is designed for unskilled workers for GS-1, WG-1, and WG-2 level positions. It provides formal and on-the-job training and the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills for advancement to higher-level positions. This appointing authority includes the Welfare to Work Initiative.

CHAPTER 5:

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

How can the Park Service reach diverse communities?

National Park Service (NPS) offices and units that are likely to have vacancies or job opportunities should develop a network of locations, organizations, and publications where diverse candidates may be found. In most cases, this means building relationships with individuals associated with community institutions. Part of the relationship building could take the form of periodic workshops on how to find jobs with the National Park Service.

If the NPS office manages a specific unit, workshops on the particular park may also be helpful. This could include information on the natural and cultural features of the park, its interpretive programs, and the history of the park and how it came to be established. The majority of Americans are not aware of the National Park Service mission, its units, or the job opportunities available. Therefore, a general awareness-building program geared to specific communities regarding the National Park Service mission, history, and operations may be necessary. Once this has begun, ongoing communications with contacts must be maintained and nurtured.

How can NPS create a regional recruitment network?

To begin building the network, NPS offices need to identify an area for outreach using a radius from the hiring office that includes at least one major metropolitan area. Offices need to research and identify the diverse communities that exist within the established radius. Within these communities, locate the places where people gather and interact. Also, identify community organizations with publications or programs that reach significant numbers of community members. This will enable the human resources managers in an NPS office to develop a network of job-posting sites, as well as a mailing and phone contact list. Literature about the park, as well as newsletters, etc., should be regularly distributed to the gathering places identified.

Some suggestions of sites and organization types to identify include:

- community organizations
- chambers of commerce
- state employment development offices
- local colleges, community colleges, universities
- business associates
- cultural centers
- volunteer centers
- conferences, job fairs
- minority presses (for posting)
- churches
- libraries

- women's organizations
- recreation centers, YMCAs

Workshops

It may be helpful to host workshops in community nexuses about employment with the National Park Service. To pool resources and offer the broadest possible array of positions, workshops could be hosted in conjunction with other federal land management agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management. These workshops should be scheduled regularly and should include basic training in how to fill out applications and where jobs will be posted. Publicize the workshops using the networks developed through regional outreach. The workshops serve not only to help connect diverse communities and employment opportunities but also to forge long-term relationships that will benefit both the parks and the communities. Parks in particular may want to consider hosting other community workshops on their parks and park programs as well.

Networking

In addition to developing a list of sites to post position announcements, National Park Service hiring offices need to develop personal contacts with various community organizations and businesses. Keeping these individuals informed on park activities even when there are no immediate job openings, and including them in all other kinds of general outreach, such as newsletters, press releases, etc., helps maintain an awareness of the NPS presence in the community. It also helps the National Park Service keep its database of these people and organizations up-to-date.

Further Outreach Efforts

The National Park Service should provide managers with training and information about cultural group outreach. Cultural sensitivity should be a component of such training programs, aiming to achieve "cultural competency" or sensitivity to cultural differences. For example, the uniform that so many NPS employees wear with pride may be intimidating, as it is reminiscent of uniforms affiliated with other federal agencies and may leave a negative impression. We should examine how others in the community perceive the National Park Service.

We must also examine how we perceive communities that are not familiar with us. Do we view them as part of our constituency and make the effort to reach out to them? Or do we see them as communities that have no interest and no stake in our parks? Are we comfortable with individuals who may be ethnically and culturally different from ourselves? If NPS employees are uncomfortable with communities different from their own, or unaware of how their appearance, words, or actions may be perceived, how can they be ambassadors to those diverse communities?

Developing a Welcoming Presence

NPS employees must learn how to welcome all people into the parks. Look at all written materials in the parks and to the community. Are they written in plain English? Are they free of bureaucratic or internal jargon? Are they written in an inviting way? Are fliers graphically engaging and eye-catching? If nearby communities include groups of people for whom English is a second language, are interpretive materials available in their native tongue?

Working as Partners

Creating community partnerships may not be easy and will take an investment of the staff's time and attention. However, the rewards we will reap as an agency will be tremendous. Not only will we be marketing the NPS mission and its parks, but we will also be introducing community members to a local natural or cultural site. To maintain vitality in the National Park Service, we must ensure that all Americans are aware of and support the national park idea.

CHAPTER 6:

Conducting an Interview

Selecting people who will work on your team is among the most important tasks you will perform as a supervisor. Poor hiring decisions have many consequences, some long-term. The time invested in preparing for an interview will pay off in long-term dividends when you hire an individual who will make a positive contribution to your team.

Components of a planned interview

- Define the competencies you want in a superior employee.
- Create open-ended questions to initiate a dialog with the applicant for each competency.
- Create situational questions to evaluate the problem-solving and analytical ability of the applicant, if appropriate.

Uses of an interview

- To **verify** information from the application.
- To **probe** into relevant parts of the applicant's experience and training.
- To **observe** firsthand the applicant's interpersonal, communication, and problem-solving skills.

Questioning techniques

Questions are the interviewer's principal method of gathering information. Five types of questioning techniques can be used during the interview:

1. Open-Ended

Example: *What is your experience in wildland firefighting?*

- The applicant does most of the talking.
- It allows the supervisor to listen and observe the applicant.
- It reduces the tension for the applicant and interviewer.
- Questions should begin with what, why, how, tell me, describe, or explain.

2. Behavioral

Example: *Think about the most challenging firefighting situation you have encountered. Describe the situation and what you did.*

- The applicant describes specific situations from his/her past.
- Applicant demonstrates qualifications by referring to specific techniques, etc.

3. Self-Appraisal

Example: *What do you think your employers saw in you that caused them to give you this responsibility? As you think back to, what would you have done differently?*

- The applicant assesses his/her own performance.
- The applicant has the opportunity to emphasize his/her strengths.

4. Situational

Example: *Your manager gave you instructions that you must carry out by the end of the shift. The instructions don't make sense to you, but by the time you realize this, the supervisor has left for the day. What would you do?*

- It provides hypothetical questions.
- It simulates situations likely to be encountered on the job.
- This method may provide a useful gauge of the applicant's aptitude, analytical ability, and problem-solving skills when the applicant has little or no direct experience.
- This should not be expressed as a "test" question, to which there is a right answer and a wrong one.
- It must be written in advance and be asked in exactly the same way of every applicant (unlike background questions that can vary from one applicant to another).

5. Vertical Questioning

This method provides in-depth questioning in a single area of experience. It may consist of all the questioning techniques described above.

Questions not to ask applicants

- Questions about race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, physical or mental condition, political affiliation, marital status, economic status, and number of children are not relevant and should be avoided during the hiring process. Do not ask questions about ethnic foods, music, or garments. Keep the questions about the job. Be careful not to call attention to an applicant's accent.
- Inquiries into the applicant's height, weight, age, conviction record, and citizenship may be legitimate if there is a connection to the requirements of the job. (Check with your servicing human resources office before asking.)

- If you ask personal questions, make sure the applicant understands why you are asking. Preface the question with, “This job requires...” (For example, ask: This job requires travel once every three months; will this be a problem? Don’t ask: Will your spouse mind if you travel every three months?)

How supervisors get into trouble on selections

- Rushing the hiring process: insufficient preparation for the interview, inadequate evaluation of the applications, insufficient data gathering through the interviews and reference checks.
- Placing too much emphasis on hiring procedures and paperwork and not enough emphasis on assessment of the applicants.
- Relying too much on information provided solely by the applications.
- Failing to properly defined the job requirements or job qualifications.
- Inability to articulate or justify selections.

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Annual Leave – Vacation time that an employee earns every two weeks.

Appointment – The terms and conditions under which you will be hired.

Area of Consideration – On a vacancy announcement, this describes from what geographic or organizational level applications will be accepted.

Benefits – The non-pay portion of an employee's compensation package. This may include life insurance, health insurance, retirement options, sick leave, annual leave, housing, etc.

Bureau – The federal government agency doing the hiring; i.e., the National Park Service.

Certificate of Eligibles – A list of highly qualified applicants forwarded to a supervisor.

Departmental – National Park Service is comprised of many different departments with different goals and objectives. A few examples of these departments include Interpretation, Maintenance and Natural Resources.

GS – The “General Schedule” or the pay system to white-collar positions in the Federal government.

Hiring Authority – When filling federal jobs, there must be an established legal citation that allows us to hire the applicant. For example, an established hiring regulation exists for students and another for veterans.

Interview – The dialog between a supervisor and an applicant wherein both determine the applicant's suitability for a particular job.

KSA's/Knowledge, Skills and Abilities – The factors against which an applicant's experience is measured; usually an applicant will submit a narrative statement describing how his or her experience falls into these categories.

Lieu Days – Non-work days.

OF-612 – see “Optional Application for Federal Employment”

Optional Application for Federal Employment – The application form accepted by federal agencies in lieu of a resume; if submitting a resume, it is important to ensure that the information requested on the OF-612 also is on your resume

Pay Period – You get paid every two weeks. There are usually 26 pay periods in a calendar year.

Permanent – A type of appointment that confers career status on an employee; benefits include life insurance, health insurance, retirement options, sick leave, annual leave, etc.

Rating Panel – An individual or group with subject matter expertise who review all qualified applications to determine who is most qualified for the position.

Reference Checks – A conversation between the selecting official and an applicant's current and/or former supervisors to determine the applicant's suitability for the position.

SCEP/Student Career Employment Program – A program where students are hired by a federal agency while they continue their academic work. See page 4 for details.

Seasonal – A type of appointment that does not confer career status on an employee. Seasons are “winter” and “summer.” Apply any time during the year at www.usajobs.opm.gov for these jobs.

Winter – Positions usually are filled beginning in October-November, and usually end in March-April.

Summer – Positions usually are filled beginning in April-June, and usually end in September-November.

Sick Leave – Time that an employee earns every two weeks for illness and medical appointments.

Status – Hiring priority given to a former permanent government employee.

STEP/Student Temporary Employment Program – This program is similar to the SCEP Program, with a few differences. See page 5 for details.

Temporary – Appointment with a specific time limit; benefits are limited to annual and sick leave.

Term – Similar to temporary, but for a period of one to four years. Provides all other benefits associated with a permanent appointment, such as retirement, but does not confer career status.

Thirty-Day Critical Need Hire – Used to fill positions quickly, as all qualifications are waived. The people working in these positions do not receive any benefits. Does not confer career status

Vacancy Announcement – The format the National Park Service uses to announce that a position is open and that applications are being accepted.

Volunteers in Parks Program – Individuals can offer their services in many aspects of National Park Service operations. Many people serve as volunteers to gain experience that will make them more competitive applicants.

WG/Wage Grade – The pay system for blue-collar positions. Wages are based on prevailing wage rates in the local area.

APPENDIX B: CONTACTS

The following individuals are available if you have any questions about this booklet, about the Community Partners Program, or about jobs in the National Park Service.

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APPENDIX C: COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Please give us your feedback on this booklet. We prepared it to be useful for both National Park Service supervisors and to applicants from community partners. How did we do?

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